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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Yediot reported that, during their meeting in Jerusalem on Sunday,
PM Ehud Olmert and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas will

discuss the "diplomatic horizon." Yediot reported that Olmert will not discuss the issues of refugees, borders, or Jerusalem with Abbas. Hatzofe reported that Hamas has announced that the US aid to the PA's security apparatus is "dirty money."

Israel Radio quoted Gen. Burhan Hamad, head of the Egyptian military delegation in Gaza, as saying that he will meet with Israeli representatives next week to hear their view about the list of Palestinian prisoners that Hamas wants released in exchange for the release of abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. The radio quoted Russian envoy Igor Ivanov, who is Russia's National Security Adviser, as saying on the Russian Vesti-TV that he is convinced that the abducted IDF soldiers will be released. The Jerusalem Post quoted PA National Security Adviser Muhammad Dahlan as saying on Thursday that Israel and Hamas do not want Abbas to play any role in the talks over Shalit's release, although Abbas is making an effort in this direction. Dahlan was also quoted as saying that a prisoner swap in the near future is unlikely.

Ha'aretz led by quoting Israel security sources as saying on Thursday that Hamas is supporting Islamic Jihad's rocket attacks against Israel with behind-the-scenes activities that include arming the organization's militants with Qassam rockets. The sources were quoted as saying that Hamas is emerging as the lynchpin of Palestinian terrorist activities against Israel. The sources added that, while Hamas is maintaining a front of abiding by the cease-fire with Israel in the Gaza Strip, it is providing Qassam rockets to Islamic Jihad militants who are targeting Israeli towns in the south. Ha'aretz quoted Israeli security sources as saying that Hamas has adopted a strategy of duality, which will be maintained under all circumstances, including a situation of a general cease-fire. On the basis of this strategy, a Palestinian organization will continue violent activities against Israel notwithstanding a cease-fire.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that, for the first time on Thursday, Hamas extremists openly demonstrated against the leadership of the group. Ha'aretz wrote that a group of nearly 200 gunmen from the military wing of Hamas and the Executive Force demonstrated in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip against the unity government and declared that they will only abide by orders from the former foreign and interior ministers, Mahmoud Zahar and Said Siam. Ha'aretz said that another reason for the mutiny revolves around disputes over the identity of the Palestinian prisoners on a list provided to Israel recently, for a possible exchange for Shalit's release. Ha'aretz reported that a meeting scheduled on Wednesday between Nizar Riyan, a senior figure in the political leadership of Hamas, and members of the "rebels" ended with an exchange of gunfire near Riyan's home.

Yediot reported that, using a "do-it-yourself" method, the Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories has been smuggling trailers into settler outposts, explicitly contravening orders by the IDF's Civil Administration in the territories. The newspaper cited an assessment that 200 trailers have been assembled so far. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli defense officials told the newspaper on Thursday that settlers have plans to purchase additional homes in Hebron which the monetary backing of right-wing Jewish holidays, to expand the size and property holdings of the Jewish community in the city. The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday Labor Party leadership candidates Ami Ayalon and Ophir Pines called on Defense Minister Amir Peretz to remove the party from Olmert's coalition if the cabinet allows settlers to remain in a contentious Hebron house.

Hatzofe cited an intelligence report recently received by the Israeli defense establishment, according to which dozens of Hizbullah fighters have received rockets from Damascus. The newspaper said that Hizbullah fighters fetch the weapons directly from Russian planes and transport them to Lebanon. Israel Radio reported that Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN's special representative for children and armed conflict, has accused Israel of having violated international law during the Second Lebanon War.

Leading media reported that on Thursday Balad Party Chairman MK Azmi Bishara confirmed his intention to resign from the Knesset, telling the Nazareth-based newspaper Hadith A-Nas that he is being persecuted. Bishara made similar statements to other Arab

newspapers.

Major media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) quoted Monsignor Antonio Franco, the Vatican's ambassador to Israel, as saying on Thursday that he will not attend the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem on Sunday in protest over a caption at the museum that states that Pope Pius XII did not protest the Nazis' mass murder of Jews during World War II. Media noted that the bitter dispute, which threatens to upset the fragile relations between the Catholic Church and Israel, has erupted as the Vatican presses ahead with longstanding plans to make Pius a saint.

Ha'aretz reported that, in a confidential internal document, air traffic controllers at Ben-Gurion Airport warned of serious safety problems.

Leading media quoted American-Syrian businessman Ibrahim (Abe) Suleiman as saying on Thursday, before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, that if Israel and Syria begin negotiations, they can reach agreement within six months and allow Damascus to disengage from Hizbullah and join the war on terrorism. During the meeting Suleiman said that "accepting the Israeli-Syrian document of understandings that was formulated will allow Syria to assist in the global struggle against terrorism, cut its ties with Hezbollah and assist the American struggle in Iraq." Suleiman, who resides in Washington, has close ties with the Syrian leadership, and called on Israel to hold official talks with Syria. The media reported that a sharp confrontation erupted during the committee session. Professor Uzi Arad of the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, an associate of former PM Binyamin Netanyahu, said that, during a meeting with Suleiman in Washington about a month ago, he had told him that the "Assad family does not want peace." Arad also claimed that Suleiman told him that the only way to make peace with Syria was to "do what the Turks did." Two issues undermining relations between Syria and Turkey were resolved when Ankara threatened Damascus with war. Ha'aretz noted that Arad had initially taken part in the talks between Suleiman, who has close ties with the Syrian regime, and Alon Liel, former head of the Foreign Ministry. After three meetings Arad left the talks, claiming that Liel was agreeing to misleading concessions. The media said that Suleiman vociferously rejected Arad's claims. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert has not allowed Suleiman to visit a Syrian imprisoned in Israel. Maariv quoted a senior Israeli official as saying that a third party is holding feelers with Damascus.

Yediot reported that Jordan's King Abdullah II has invited Knesset Speaker and Acting President of Israel Dalia Itzik for a one-day visit to Amman next week.

Conservative American journalist Robert Novak was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz, during a recent visit to Israel, that he has "formed the impression that the Palestinians are prepared to reach an agreement, and that if there were a more courageous leadership in the United States and in Israel, it would be possible to make the Arab League's resolution in Riyadh a lever for progress toward a peace agreement."

Ha'aretz wrote that a review of recently unsealed Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings from 1967 afford a candid look at Washington's views on Israel, the Arabs, and American Jews at the time of the Six-Day War. In particular, the newspaper addressed the question of how far America should go in safeguarding Israel's interests, which Ha'aretz noted has been troubling US lawmakers for decades.

All media reported that on Thursday the Tel Aviv District Court sentenced three Israelis -- one of them a Jew -- to 13 years in prison for driving a Palestinian suicide bomber to the Netanya shopping mall in 2005, where he carried out an attack in which five people were killed and 30 injured.

Leading media reported that Israel has refused entry to the Muslim wife of a Jewish immigrant from Iran. She is currently in custody in Turkey but could be sent back to Iran within days, where she is likely to be severely punished.

All media reported on Thursday's suicide bombing in Iraq's Parliament and the truck bombing that destroyed a bridge over the Tigris River in Baghdad. A Ha'aretz commentary is headlined: "Strategic Bombing."

Yediot quoted associates of Finance Minister Abraham Hirschson as saying that he will soon be resigning. Maariv reported that the police also suspect Hirschson of tax fraud.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that far-reaching changes have been promised at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to prevent a repeat of the incident where the Deputy British Ambassador was strip-searched by security officers on her way to a pre-arranged meeting at the PMO last month.

Maariv reported that the New York City parade that will commemorate 40 years of the reunification of Jerusalem will feature a model of the Western Wall.

All media reported that the rate of the US dollar on the Tel Aviv financial market continued to drop on Thursday (4.066 shekels to a dollar). Maariv bannered: "Free Fall."

Maariv printed the results of a TNS/Teleseker Polling Institute survey according to which 72 percent of Israelis support a bill stating that every candidate for the Knesset will be required to pledge that he recognizes the existence of Israel as a Jewish state; 18 percent are opposed.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The Prime Minister finds himself in an unfortunate negotiating position because his predecessors failed..... Public opinion will determine the expectation that Israel will eventually give in."

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "When the government rejects Arab hands stretched out in peace, the Knesset cannot make do with deliberations void of political impact."

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/13): "US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is the moon that governs the tide of Middle East diplomatic activity. When she visits the region, activity flows; when she is absent, it ebbs."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in Ha'aretz: "It is a serious mistake to think that refraining from a reaction to the kidnapping of the soldiers in July would have spared us a war. The war would have arrived later, after greater incitement on the part of Hizbullah and Iran."

Block Quotes:

11. "Olmert's Catch-22"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (4/13): "At the time he heard the news about the kidnapping of the soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser in northern Israel, Ehud Olmert was sitting with the parents of Gilad Shalit, explaining to them that he would redeem their son with the release Palestinian prisoners with blood on their hands. Surrendering to terror was not on the agenda. This was an absolute principle, even if Olmert himself were to pay a hefty personal price for this. This was Ehud No. 1. Ehud No. 2 is now in charge.... The Prime Minister finds himself in an unfortunate negotiating position because his predecessors failed..... Public opinion will determine the expectation that Israel will eventually give in.... Olmert No. 1 knew that willingness to discuss the release of murderers would be a mistake. Olmert No. 2 is someone completely different."

II. "The Prince of Tides"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/13): "US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is the moon that governs the tide of Middle East diplomatic activity. When she visits the region, activity flows; when she is absent, it ebbs.... Rice is delaying [her next visit] until after [the publication of the interim report of the] Winograd [Commission probing the Second Lebanon War], apparently so she can gauge Olmert's domestic political position... The Saudis, too, seem to be waiting to see how things play out domestically in Israel before making their next move. Following the Riyadh conference, a decision was made to set up working groups to make contacts -- as the Bahraini Foreign Minister said -- 'all influential parties, including Israel, to activate the Arab Peace Initiative'.... It is doubtful, however, that the super-cautious Saudis would take a step pregnant with such significance in the Arab world if they were not convinced that their Israeli interlocutor, Olmert, would still be the prime minister a few months down the line."

III. "Stepping Into the Diplomatic Void"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/13): "The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee welcomed an unusual guest yesterday. The committee chairman, MK Tzachi Hanegbi, and MK Zahava Gal-On, invited Dr. Ibrahim (Abe) Suleiman, an American of Syrian origin, and Dr. Alon Liel, a former director general at the Foreign Ministry, to hear about their secret talks and the framework they formulated for a diplomatic settlement between Israel and Syria.... If Israel had a proper prime minister, he would not have allowed an individual with ties to the Syrian leadership to visit the Knesset (and Yad Vashem) without inviting him to cross the street to his office so that he could meet with Israeli decision-makers.... A senior official at the Foreign Ministry said in response [to a similar rejection by his ministry] that 'there was no wish to create a false impression, as if officials are holding negotiations with Suleiman.' According to the official, if Syria wants to negotiate, there are other ways to do that. What other 'ways' is he talking about? Is he not aware that the Israeli government has kept its ears closed for the past year to the repeated calls by President Assad -- publicly and through diplomatic channels -- for a resumption of peace talks? Parliamentary activity, however energetic and important it may be, cannot serve as an alternative to the continued paralysis of the political leadership. In the situation we find ourselves, when the government rejects Arab hands stretched out in peace, the Knesset cannot make do with deliberations void of political impact. All elected representatives opposed to this will be responsible for the results of such failure."

IV. "There Should Have Been a Preventive Strike"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in Ha'aretz (4/13): "[During the years preceding the Second Lebanon War, Israel] did not try to stop the transfer of Iranian weapons to Damascus, a move the Americans implied they would accept with understanding. Israel never once struck at the convoys transferring the missiles to Lebanon, and never struck even one Hizbullah missile warehouse, or even the short-range rockets near the border. Although Israel prepared itself adequately for long-range missiles and carried out several painful localized operations, these did not affect the construction of the threatening system. The result was that during this period Israeli deterrence against Hizbullah and Iran increasingly eroded.... The prime minister at the time, Ehud Barak, rejected the suggestion by chief of staff Shaul Mofaz to take strong action against Hizbullah after the kidnapping of the three soldiers. The main reason was to not open a second front. Israel wanted to focus on the Palestinian front. This was later also the opinion of Ariel Sharon as prime minister. Sharon certainly did not want to open a second, broader front against Iran, which had built the threatening system in Lebanon. Hizbullah and Iran read things differently. They understood that Israel was incapable of properly handling combat on two fronts at the same time. Hizbullah acted on this assumption when it embarked on the kidnapping on July 12, 2006.... It is a serious mistake to think that refraining from a reaction to the kidnapping of the soldiers in July would have spared

us a war. The war would have arrived later, after greater

incitement on the part of Hizbullah and Iran."

12. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized:
"Politically, the Democrats would demonstrate willingness to stand together against a common threat, and inoculate themselves from accusations that they are 'soft on Iran.'"

Block Quotes:

"Don't Undermine Sanctions"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/13):
"We have no comment on the age-old debate between American branches of government over the right to conduct foreign policy. Yet the issue is not just a matter of rights, but of wisdom, and of the impact that particular strategy might have on American effectiveness in the world. The choice of Pelosi and Lantos to visit Damascus, for example, and the latter's design to go to Tehran illustrate what might be called an obsession with the 'importance of dialogue.' Is Pelosi really claiming that there has been a lack of dialogue with Iran?.... Europe would be more receptive to a call for draconian sanctions if it came from both sides of the American aisle. Politically, the Democrats would demonstrate willingness to stand together against a common threat, and inoculate themselves from accusations that they are 'soft on Iran.' Substantively, they could show that they take their own belief in nonmilitary measures seriously, and want to put them into practice as strongly as possible."

JONES